DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 047 564 FL 002 037

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TITLE	The Future of Greek in Schools.
INSTITUTION	Joint Association of Classical Teachers, Oxford (England).
PUB DATE	67
NOTE	11p.
JOURNAL CIT	Didaskalos; v2 n2 p12-22 1967
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Articulation (Program), *Classical Languages, Curriculum Development, *Greek, *Greek Literature, *Language Instruction, Language Learning Levels, Language Tests, Motivation, *Secondary Schools, Student Motivation
IDENTIFIERS	*England

ABSTRACT

The future of Greek in the English school system is seen to be directly dependent on two major issues discussed in this paper. The author argues in the first instance for the teaching of Greek literature in translation, particularly to the non-specialist. The second issue of importance is treated in a review of program articulation and examination policies in the Greek language courses designed for the specialist. With a two-track approach to classical studies it is hoped that the place of Greek will be assured in the curriculum. (RL)

from: Didaskalos; v2 n2 p12-22 1967

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The future of Greek in schools

CAROL HANDLEY

For more than a century the time spent in schools on the study of Greek and Latin has been diminishing. New subjects have been introduced into the curriculum and older subjects have steadily renounced their claim on the timetable. The process is still continuing. There are excellent arguments for including more science in the curriculum, more economics and sociology, for studying more Slavonic and Asiatic languages, for including statistics and computer-programming and increasing the opportunities for the study of art, linguistics and comparative religion. The claims of many subjects to be included in the school curriculum are strong, and yet the week is still the same length. Therefore we must select the subjects to be taught and consider at what stage in the educational system they can most profitably be taught: i.e. in the middle school, in the sixth form, or at the universities.

Greek has been one of the chief casualties of this pressure on the curriculum. Traditionally it has been regarded as an extension of Latin, and in many schools it is regarded as such an impracticably luxurious extension that it cannot be offered at all, and where it does exist it is normally only available to potential specialists in Classics.[1] In this paper I hope to show that the study of Greek literature, both in translation and in the original, has much to offer the non-specialist–so much to offer that educationists may be persuaded to allow Greek courses a place in the timetables of future schools.

People often speak of Greek courses as if they had been static

[1] There are still a few grammar and public schools to which this statement does not apply.

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and unchanged for centuries (except for a little erosion) and were only now facing radical change; and yet in the last 400 years the emphasis and content of courses has altered constantly with the interests of successive generations.[2] Greek has shown a remarkable adaptability in satisfying the needs of different ages. Yet some of our problems today are due to the fact that Greek courses in schools are still fundamentally nineteenth-century in their content: the concentration on linguistic detail presupposes a prolonged course of study, such as is unlikely to be possible in the future in any but comparatively few schools.

Greek (and Latin too for that matter) has suffered from the swing of the pendulum away from nineteenth-century schemes of education. Today we are paying the price of the arrogant refusal of nineteenth-century classicists to admit the value of any other subjects (except possibly Mathematics). Furthermore, one cannot avoid the suspicion that it was not only the subject matter of Latin and Greek which commended them, but also their linguistic difficulty. The study of the Classics provided a steep and stony path for the young to struggle up with plenty of opportunity for improving chastisement. It is perhaps from this period that we inherit some of the more ambitious theories about the value of Classics as a character-forming discipline.

Now the state of affairs is very different. We no longer believe that it is good for a pupil to be forced by the fear of punishment to learn what bores him. Indeed we hope that by stimulating his interest we can persuade him to make enough effort for successful progress, thus discovering the fascination of the subject and the resources of his own mind.

There are now signs that the image of Greek is changing. It is no longer just another and even remoter dead language. Televised archaeology, productions of Greek tragedy, Penguin Classics, superbly illustrated books and far wider opportunities for travel have stimulated interest in the ancient world and in Greece in particular. It is now rare to be asked by a child about Greek 'What use is it?' Over the last few years at Camden School for Girls we have found that one of the most consistently popular courses in sixth-form general studies has

[2] See M. L. Clarke, *Greek Studies in England*, 1700-1830, ch. II.

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been the History of Greek Ideas. Young people today have a tremendous interest in social, political and philosophical ideas. Plato, Thucydides and Greek tragedy never fail to fascinate them, as much for their contemporary relevance as for their historical interest. In addition to this there is the more obvious literary interest in comparing Racine's Phèdre with Euripides' Hippolytus, or Sophocles' Antigone with Anouilh's, or tracing the course of epic from Homer to Milton through Virgil. There is in fact ample evidence to show that there are no problems about the acceptability of courses in Greek literature in translation in the upper levels of schools. The only problems are the limitations of time for both staff and pupils. It may be that as the size of sixth forms increases and more time is given to 'minority' subjects it will become more generally possible to offer this option to pupils.

COURSES IN TRANSLATION

Courses of this type are not only of interest to pupils–there are innumerable courses which provide interest–but they have a rôle of vital importance. Often they will provide the only contact with the classical ideas and literary forms which are essential for the understanding of much of Western history, literature and art. In this country we have been slow to recognize the need for courses in translation, perhaps because until recent years there has still been so much Latin and Greek taught in schools that we have become accustomed to the idea that a basic knowledge of the classical world is something which every school child has. In fact the absurdity of this notion is obvious. In the USA the need is met by courses at university level. In Denmark a course in Greek literature in translation and Greek art of the same period is a compulsory part of the curriculum of every gymnasium. In this country, where the normal university course only lasts for three years and is highly specialized, it seems clear that it is in the schools that this deficiency can best be met.[3]

Some steps are now being taken. Perhaps the most important is the work now being done on courses in General Classics

[3] There are now courses in Greek civilization at several universities.

aimed at the first two years in secondary schools.[4] There is already some evidence that courses of this kind stimulate interest in the classical world and make an excellent preparation for the next stage, which may be either the study of Latin or Greek (or both), or the following of one of the GCE O-level or CSE courses on Greek literature in translation or classical civilization.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, these courses there is still scope for a sixth-form course in Greek literature in translation. Such a course would normally be aimed at the more academic section of the sixth form, and would include Homer, Tragedy, some Herodotus and Thucydides, Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedo* and possibly some extracts from Aristotle. Ideally the study of the literature should be accompanied by the opportunity to study parallel developments in Greek art. In the present state of sixth-form work it would probably not be feasible to make such a course into an examination subject, but if the Schools Council adopts the scheme for two major and two minor subjects at A-level, a course on Greek literature and civilization might well prove very popular as a minor subject with both arts and science specialists. The probability of this is borne out by the fact that in the last few years many schools have found an increasing demand by non-classicists to study Ancient History at A-level. The new Ancient History syllabus (inspired by Dr Moses Finley and pioneered by a JACT working party) should go far towards satisfying those with historical, social or political interests. It would be attractive to see a second syllabus which would cater for the pupils who were not classical specialists but were interested primarily in the art, literature or philosophy of Greece.

There are, however, some difficulties about such a project. 1 If a course in translation at this level is to be worth while, it must be taught by a classical specialist. In class discussion there will be innumerable occasions when a knowledge of the precise meaning of the language of the original or its historical

[4] See JACT Pamphlet No. 2, and in particular the article by Mr W. B. Thompson of the Department of Education at Leeds University, at which successful courses for teachers of General Classics have been held; and also the work of the Nuffield Cambridge Schools Classics Project.

context is needed. Key words such as ἄτη, δίκη, σώφρων, σωφροσύνη, σοφός, σοφία which recur in Greek may appear as a series of different terms in English.[5] Certain phrases in the translation may give a misleading impression. In short, the presence of someone in the room who knows Greek will repair some of the deficiencies of working through translation. The General Classics course for first- and second-year pupils can be successfully taught by non-classicists if they have been trained for it and have materials available. The sixth-form course can only be taught effectively by a classical or, at least, a Greek specialist and therefore it could meet with staffing difficulties.

2 There is the fear that courses in translation would remove the incentive to learn the language. This can be discounted. Experience shows that the reverse is more likely to be the case.

3 Finally there is the fear that the existence of courses in translation might provide a powerful argument for the abolition of language courses as unnecessary. This undoubtedly constitutes a certain risk. The reward one might hope for is the re-education of popular opinions about the value of the Classics. Amongst the next generation Greek and Latin might finally lose their image of out-dated survivals from an out-moded system of education and be appreciated for what they are. It is to be hoped that the time will come when a course in Greek literature and art will form one of many alternative courses in the sixth form of schools, and when that time comes the provision of an A-level syllabus will be valuable. In the meantime the more teachers of Classics can do to reach pupils outside their own language classes as well as within, the more hope we shall have of changing the climate of opinion in future generations.

To sum up:

Courses in translation have a valuable part to play

1 in providing some knowledge of a valuable part of our cultural heritage and giving those who might otherwise never have the opportunity some contact with works of literature and art of the highest quality;

[5] [Cf. Professor Peters's article p. 8. Ed.]

2 in stimulating an interest in the Classics and a desire to learn the languages;
3 in altering the image which future generations (including future headmasters) may have of the Classics, so that more people recognize their interest and relevance.

But a course in translation cannot do everything. At the higher levels it must be taught by classicists. It cannot directly produce more classicists. Therefore there must also be courses in the Greek and Latin languages available at some stage in the educational system to produce more classicists. By themselves courses in translation can never be enough.

GREEK LANGUAGE COURSES

Who will learn Greek? At what stage in the school or university system should courses in Greek be available? What sort of courses should there be in schools?

The first two questions are closely linked. If the present interest in the classical world increases and is successfully fostered by junior school courses on classical topics, there is likely to be an increasing interest in learning the Greek language, particularly if it is possible for 'non-specialists' to do so. Children are often deterred by the thought of binding themselves body and soul to Classics in the sixth form and university, whereas they will gladly seize the opportunity to take Greek to O-level or even as an extra A-level subject alongside two others which will form the basis of their university studies. Under a scheme for two major and two minor subjects at A-level, Greek might well prove a very attractive option as 'light relief' for science specialists or as an extension of the field of study for arts specialists. In a school where the mixing of arts and science subjects is possible, Greek and English literature have proved to be two of the most popular choices among the arts subjects for those whose main interests lie in the sciences.

If, on the other hand, Greek continues to be regarded as a subject which only potential classical specialists should begin,

it will have little hope of survival. What we must strive for is that all children in secondary schools should have some introduction to aspects of classical civilization; the way should then be open for the next step, which could be the study of a classical language, of Ancient History, or of literature in translation at O-level or A-level or at the university.

As for the level of ability required in the pupil, it is impossible to define it precisely. The main factor for O-level is interest rather than academic ability, although no one would deny that there is a point beyond which the struggle becomes greater than the reward. The question is largely one of time. Greek is not inherently more difficult to learn than Latin or Russian, but if pupils have only two years to reach O-level or CSE they will clearly have to be more able than if they had three or four years to assimilate the same knowledge of the language. It is therefore unlikely to be a viable option for the lower streams of a comprehensive school, but it might well prove an attractive option for some of the upper streams. It is, however, always likely to remain the choice of comparatively few and its existence will depend on the liberality of the attitude of the headmaster or headmistress to minority interests, and on the cogency with which classicists put their case to their pupils and to their principals. There are, however, some factors which could favour the introduction of more Greek courses.

1 New techniques and tools in language teaching are being studied and introduced. With their aid it should be possible to teach the elements of language more quickly and more effectively. This means that it should still be possible to have an O-level Greek course in schools where it is not practicable to begin before the age of 14. Or, if Greek is not begun until the sixth form, it should be possible for pupils to make rapid enough progress to read a satisfying amount during an O-level course and even to reach A-level standard in two years (particularly if a minor A-level comes into existence).

2 The trend towards larger schools should allow for greater flexibility in the curriculum and a wider range of options in the timetable. There are always likely to be some pupils who would choose to learn Greek as an alternative to a second modern language if given the opportunity.

3 There are now more university courses which allow Greek to be combined with subjects other than Latin. This is an encouragement to those who enjoy Greek but do not wish to read Classics. It is also possible for those who have not learned Greek at school to begin it at some universities.

Greek then can be begun in the middle school, the sixth form, or at the university, and pupils in some schools will no doubt continue to have the opportunity of starting at an earlier stage. Thus any courses devised for schools must be extremely flexible if they are to meet all needs. We must also remember that we are dealing with a practical, and not a purely theoretical situation. Greek is still taught in a number of schools in the British Isles and it is studied in very varying conditions and in courses of very different length. The fact that Greek is still taught in some schools is largely due to the principals of those schools, who retain it in the curriculum either by force of tradition or because they are convinced of its educational value. The English system of education is unique in that it allows individual heads to decide (within wide limits) what subjects are to be taught in their schools. This situation can favour those seeking to promote the study of Greek in a particular school. There is only one man to convince and not an elusive and faceless council of bureaucrats committed to legislating equally for a whole district. Even though there may be only one man to convince, he will still have to be convinced, and so any suggested course of study in Greek must be logically defensible. It will be easier to defend if the public examination syllabus reflects the essential aims of the course of study. The less time there is available for study, the greater will be the influence of the examination syllabus on what is taught. This leads us to the final question, 'What sort of courses are needed?'

Obviously the content of the course will vary with the time available for study. For example, in many public schools and some grammar schools Greek is studied for four or even five years up to O-level. In a course of such a length it should be possible to master elementary grammar and syntax, read some Greek in the original and learn something about the civilization. If all this can be achieved the pupil will have an excellent

foundation for more advanced work, and even if he gives up the subject after O-level he will still have learned something worth while. But in most schools the problem is not how to make the best use of four or five years, but rather whether anything worth while can be achieved in two years; and the effect of secondary reorganization on the state schools is likely to make this problem more acute rather than less acute. The establishment of two-tier schools with transfer at 13 or 14 and 11-18 comprehensive schools with a common curriculum for the first two or three years will probably mean that Latin is not begun until three or even two years before O-level, and so it may become even harder to find a niche for Greek. What then is the essential aim? What is the smallest gain which makes the labour of learning the Greek language worth while? It is the opportunity to read some of the best of Greek literature in Greek. Many aspects of Greek civilization can be studied in translation, as we have seen, but there will always be one element missing. Only by reading the works of Greek writers in the words in which they wrote them is it possible to discover the full effect of the poetry and to perceive the interaction of patterns of thought and patterns of syntactical structure. The aim, then, must be to teach the pupil enough Greek to read some Greek literature in Greek. How is this aim to be expressed in terms of an examination syllabus and what means should be used to bring the pupil to this level of attainment?

It is not, at this time, very profitable to discuss methods of teaching. They must inevitably vary with circumstance and are likely to change considerably in the near future as the results of linguistic research become available and can be turned into classroom material. All that can be said is that, if the first aim is to read Greek literature, all teaching should be directed primarily towards enabling the pupil to understand passages written in Greek as easily and as confidently as possible.

If this aim of reading some Greek literature in the original is to be realized in as little as two years, and is to be assessed by examination, it implies the study of set books. But it is not likely to be possible to read as a set book for O-level the whole of a Greek tragedy, for example, or several books of Homer.

Therefore the requirement should be, say, 400 lines in Greek and the rest in translation. This combination of work in Greek and work in translation is cardinal, for it permits the pupils to study a complete work and therefore to exercise their critical abilities in a way which would be impossible if they had studied only extracts. In addition to this work on set books there should also be an easy test of the candidates' linguistic attainment. The aim would be to test the candidates' ability to understand a passage of Greek by translation, comprehension questions or any other means to be devised. It cannot be stressed enough that this section must be really easy and must test the pupil's familiarity with the most common and normal features of the language, rather than his knowledge of irregular and obscure phenomena and the grammarians' names for them. Under present regulations there would also have to be a passage of English to be translated into Greek. If this requirement should cease to exist composition could then become optional.

Thus we should have an O-level syllabus comprising a language paper and a literature paper based on the study of books read partly in Greek and partly in translation. Candidates would be asked to translate passages, comment on the relevance, or the subject matter, of the same or different passages, and to write essays on topics which would demand an assessment of the book as a whole. To complete such a syllabus would be a worth-while goal, and attainable after as little as two years of study by able pupils (and a little more by less able ones). Even if the pupil ceased to study Greek after O-level he would have learned something of value and not otherwise attainable. For those with more time it offers enough scope for further study in the literature paper as well as the language paper. The fact that the examination is limited to testing the first aim–to read some Greek literature in Greek–should not deter any teacher with time to spare from exploring other aspects of Greek civilization. An examination syllabus must be reduced to the minimum for the sake of those with minimum time. Those with more time can always make profitable use of it. Such a syllabus should form an adequate basis for further study, both for the present type of A-level syllabus and for any possible future ones which might offer more scope for literary

appreciation. With such a syllabus it should become possible to direct all our efforts to the primary objective of reading some of the greatest literature that has ever been written in the language in which it was written.

Thus in every generation there would be a few who had been in direct contact with the literature of an age which has deeply influenced our own ways of thought, and who could reinterpret for the next generation something of its wisdom, artistry and insight into the essential nature of man. To preserve the knowledge of what is best in the past and to transmit it to the future is one of the functions of education. Great literature transcends time and race; it extends vision and increases understanding of the human spirit; it is 'educational' in the widest sense of the word. There can be few subjects in the school curriculum which can serve these functions of education as effectively as the study of Greek literature.

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